



Article by Etnia Nativa

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Ponton, its view towards the Bay

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Today, in this weekly episode, Etnia Nativa shares a bit of the life of our white Protestant descendants who started building their houses on the hill at "Ponton", since it offered a privileged view over the whole Bay Area of Playa, also known as Pardenbaai or "Horses bay".

Entering the eighteenth century, there lived few whites, reformed Europeans on the island other than the commander with his family, few personnel in the service of the West Indian Company and some white renegades who intermarried with the native Caquetian nobles. Trade with Spanish America was increasing. As a result of this, Pardenbaai, which from a nautical strategical point of view, offered more favorable conditions compared to Commandeursbaai, the late harbour in Savaneta, this latter eclipsed as a discharging-berth for cattle. No other Europeans had yet settled on the bay proper, other than some merchants of Jewish descent who came hailing from Curaçao after the discovery of gold, and chose their residences in the vicinity of Paardenbaai, i.e. on higher ground. We can only find an Amerindian or Caquetian village occupying both sides of a small sea inlet known as Lagoen. The first stone houses were not built there until 1796 or 1797, when the first WIC battery was erected at the entrance to the bay in order to offer protection to the ships anchored there, against privateers.



In the meantime, trade activities round Paardenbaai continued to pick up quickly and, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, made the commander shift his residence to a closer and taller area, so the place Ponton became the principal dwelling-center of that current period.

Ponton offered the additional advantage of an unimpeded view southward across the bay, what today is known as Punta Brabo, whereas to the north it facilitated the commander's supervision of the Caquetian Amerindian dwellings of Noord and vicinity.

Undisputed evidence of the settlement of white people in Ponton, is the graveyard that denotes the existence of a colonial cemetery. The first to be buried there was the commander - Jan van der Biest Jr. and his family. J. van der Biest Jr. served from 1772 to 1782, and his grave can still be seen today. Unfortunately, the commander's and other copper name plates were stolen by vandals. Imprudently repaired later and since then nobody has been able to identify them. The cemetery itself, both inside and outside the walls, preserves the memory of what was once the residence of Protestant figures from Aruba who defied the Brits that for a while took over the island. Commander Jan Van der Biest Jr. was succeeded by a third Van der Biest, Harmen, brother of Jan Junior, who remained in office until 1791, when he was dismissed for reasons of advanced age. He was followed by

Commander Jacobus Pellicorne Porrier and then Borchard Specht, who, according to historians, was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands and married the commander's Poppe's daughter, Catharina Raders.

A historian who visited Aruba around 1825 mentioned that at that time he could still see the remains of the commander's house in Ponton and that the masonry recess in which the flagpole had been placed was intact. In 1825, prominent people no longer lived there, but there were still limestone houses in the surrounding area where goats and cows were raised.

On a clear day from Ponton, you can distinguish the coastal silhouette of the Paraguaná isthmus with the Santa Ana hill rising up on the other side of the strait that separates Aruba from Venezuela on the South American continent.

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